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# God's Heroes

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# GOD'S HEROES

A
DRAMA
IN FIVE ACTS

BY

LAURA CLIFFORD BARNEY

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# PREFACE.

Introductions should often be divided into two unequal parts—one for the reader of little patience; the other for the heroic investigator. So, first, I shall briefly say that this work portrays but a fragment of one of the most dramatic periods in history, and is but a limited presentation of the most vast philosophy yet known to man. For the rest, beware! hasty reader, and turn over these pages, unless you feel the wish to know what my subject really is, and why I have chosen to express such a subject in drama.

From earliest times it has been the office of the theatre to present the forces and events which form the lives of men. It originated in antiquity at the foot of the altar of the Gods, whose will was there shown forth to mortals in sacred performances; also, in the middle ages fervent Christians acted the mystery plays in the very shadow of the Church. But another theatre arose almost simultaneously with these sacred performances—a theatre dedicated to the portrayal of human passions; and from this is descended the theatre of today.

Some regard it merely as a temple of art; others believe that its highest expression is attained only when it contributes, also, to the moral development of society; and, consequently, they deplore certain abuses of the present theatre which appeal too often to the base emotions of men and array vice in the multi-coloured veils of dissimulation. This modern tendency to present the heedless conduct of the

minority in a form so alluring that it calls forth toleration, sympathy and encouragement, can be only harmful.

The writers of plays should always be true psychologists: then if they treat of the faults of men and women they will do so boldly and show them as they really are, and the result will be good; for when the mirror of truth is held before the gaze, he is blind indeed who can turn away uninfluenced by the sight of a disorderly reflection. Masters of the dramatic art always have been genuine moralists. Who, on seeing Shakespeare's plays, does not realize the evils of ambition, jealousy, and licentiousness; or, beholding the personages of Molière, perceive the folly of frivolity, hypocrisy and pedantry?

The theatre, like all other forces, may upbuild or shatter. It can be a mighty instrument for spreading ideas broadcast; and, for this reason, I believe that the wave of regeneration, which is sweeping over the world, should take form also on the stage; and am trying, therefore, in this play, to bring before the public some of the most inspiring events of our epoch.

My scene is laid in the distant Orient, in a country full of archaic and barbaric customs—the Persia of over half a century ago; but the aspirations of my heroes are of all ages and of all lands.

I only regret that I might not thoroughly describe the life of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab, from 1844, when he first felt impelled to guide men to nobler ways of thought and of life: how hate and jealousy sprang up in his

path, but how his unswerving will surmounted all obstacles; how he was persecuted, imprisoned, and finally killed in 1850; how he imbued thousands of his Persian brothers with courage and righteousness, and prepared them to await a greater disclosure of truth from One who should come to complete the work of reformation; how, in their turn, his followers bore the greatest hardships brought upon them by the infuriated clergy and populace, and even were killed in tens of thousands on account of their unorthodox belief; and how, in those days of persecution, Baha'u'llah stood forth in the fury of the storm, gathering around him the disciples of the Bab, and declaring the deeper meaning of his message. Then, I should have liked to tell of the transformation of Babism into Bahaism through the teaching of Baha'u'llah, who explained that, beside the reform of perversions in Islam, there should be a general reform of all abuses in human society; and that the barriers of hate between castes, between nations, and between religions should be levelled, so that all men might unite in one great brotherhood under an universal code of love and of honour, free from superstition, division and dogma. It is a pity not to recount Baha'u'llah's life minutely, not to follow him step by step through his exile from country to country, to his final imprisonment in Acca. Brought up amid the luxuries of a noble family he yet accepted with joy all privations which came to him during his tedious banishment and long confinement, until in 1892 he died, leaving to his remarkable son 'Abdu'l-Baha the mission of spreading his word through-

out the world. That cry of regeneration raised behind prison walls now echoes abroad in the hearts of men.

All this I would have written in full detail, but a play is a play, and not a series of books. I have, therefore, presented to the public only a few episodes in the early Babi history, and only a few of the noted characters of that period: yet, even this imperfect sketch should suffice to give an idea of the vastness of the movement.

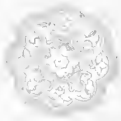
I have thought it preferable not to have the Bab or Baha'u'llah appear on the scene, for certain beings cannot be adequately impersonated; their influence, nevertheless, will be felt throughout the play, and especially in the life of the splendid Qurratu'l-'Ain, who stands forth in history as an example of what the disciple of truth can accomplish despite hampering custom, and violent persecution.

Indulgent reader, I am aware that the only merit of my play is its subject; yet I hope, notwithstanding, to give you a glimpse of Eastern glory, and to awaken your interest in this great movement, the universal religion—Bahaism, which is today bringing peace and hope to expectant humanity.

L. C. B.

PARIS, April, 1909.

GOD'S HEROES



## PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

QURRATU'L-'AIN, *afterwards named* TAHIRA. *Divinely human.*

FATIMA.....QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *younger sister. Gentle and womanly.*

LAILA.....AKBAR'S *wife. Delicate and broken-hearted.*

DAIA.....*Old nurse. Mistakes vice for virtue through habit and desire.*

THE KALANTAR'S FIRST WIFE.

THE KALANTAR'S SECOND WIFE, *and mother of the betrothed.*

RUHANGIS.....*The young betrothed of* AKBAR.

A VISITOR.

TWO LITTLE BOYS....QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *children.*

SALIH.....QURRATU'-L'AIN'S *father. Benevolent.*

'ALI.....QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *uncle. Broad-minded, well-balanced.*

TAQI.....QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *uncle and father-in-law. Arrogant, heedless.*

'ABDU'L-WAHAB.....QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *brother. Upright, stern Muhammadan.*

See next page for continuation of Cast.

MUHAMMAD.....QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *husband and cousin. Worldly, good looking.*

QUDDUS.....*Beautiful, æsthetic and virile.*

HUSAIN.....*The* KALANTAR'S *son. Ardent, intelligent, and sympathetic.*

AKBAR.....*Passionate, ambitious, resentful.*

AMIN.....*Old family friend. Sincere, but narrow.*

BASHIR.....*Old negro servant. Devoted and pathetic.*

SHIRAZI.....*Type of warlike follower of Muhammad.*

HADI, WALI.....*Usual type of Babi. Brave, clear headed.*

A BABI.....*In name only, not in thought.*

AHMAD.....*An inquiring and kindly mind.*

NASIR.....*Negro eunuch. Silent personage.*

Mullas, Babis, Soldiers, Servants, Musicians, Women, Handmaidens, and Dancer.

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SCENE: PERSIA. TIME: 1848 TO 1852.

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NOTE.—For the convenience of the Western public, the titles of address, which always accompany oriental names, have been omitted throughout the play.

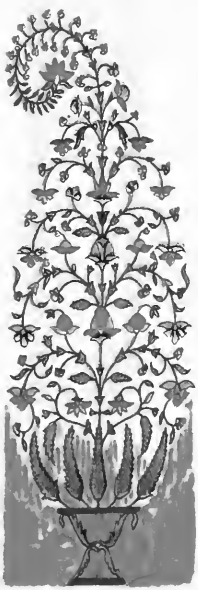
# ACT I

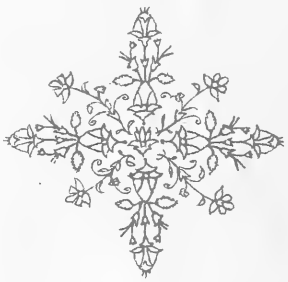
## QASWIN

## A PERSIAN ROSE-GARDEN

## DAWN

THE AZAN CALLS THE FAITHFUL TO AWAKE





## ACT I

SCENE—*The night is breaking into day, and the Azan, the call for prayer chanted from the minaret of the mosque, is summoning the Faithful to awake. A Persian rose garden breathes its sweetness upon the air. Around a fountain are high wooden couches covered over with sombre carpets, where men are sleeping. The awakening day draws them slowly from their slumbers. The men arise. Their faces and hands are sprinkled with rose water, turbans are wound on the fez, and sashes wrapped around the waist, the long flowing abas are slipped over the shoulders.*

### SCENE I

'ALI, TAQI, AMIN, AKBAR. *Later* BASHIR, SHIRAZI, NASIR *and* SALIH.

'ALI

Awake, my honoured comrades, come from the world of sleep to the world of reality.

AKBAR

Ah! I am numb. I have slept in a false position.

TAQI

I go to the mosque, for after prayer I must detain the worshippers to urge them to exterminate the followers of Anti-Christ.

'ALI

But they are of the noblest men in the land. Reflect on their merit, then justice will prompt you to cease your futile and unwarranted denunciations.

TAQI

Still must they die, for it is commanded to kill the infidel.

(TAQI *goes out shadowed by* SHIRAZI *who, at the beginning of the Act, had entered the garden unnoticed, but who, on hearing these words turns back and glides after* TAQI, *muttering.*)

SHIRAZI

Your own condemnation will condemn you, for the vengence of Allah is swift and sure !

(*The prayer to Allah is performed; then the glittering samovar is borne in and set down on a huge brass tray; everything is deftly prepared, and the men seat themselves to drink the honey-coloured tea.*)

SALIH
(*entering*)

Greetings to you my beloved guests ! I hope the night has spread the balm of rest upon your wearied bodies ; but, 'Ali, has our noble brother already left us ?

'ALI
(*ironically*)

Yes, gone to the mosque for prayer, to commune with God !

AKBAR

Taqi has great work to perform, for to-day he will publicly denounce the Anti-Christ, the false "Bab."

SALIH

The existence of this sect is a fiery torment to him.

AKBAR

And should be to all good Muslims, for has not this young imposter usurped that great title, "Bab," the Gate of Knowledge?

'ALI

Still, Akbar, his followers say he proves his claim for those who care to listen.

SALIH

(*turning to where* AMIN *is heavily sleeping*)

Ah! Amin slumbers still!

'ALI

Yes, our dear old friend heard not the Muazzin summoning us to arise, nor my cruel voice jarring on the stillness, but perhaps the soft hum of the samovar will rouse him.

AMIN

(*waking reluctantly*)

Peace be upon you!

ALL

Upon you be peace!

SALIH

Did you rest, Amin, according to the desire of a loving host?

AMIN

(*beckoning for tea*)

Your rose-garden is a corner of Paradise, and your company is sweeter to my soul than dark-eyed houris; but last night's discussion, in the form of scorpions, haunted my dreams and envenomed all my rest.

(*beckons for more sugar.*)

AKBAR

Respected comrade, it was your conscience rebelling against the words you spoke in favour of the "Bab," as his deluded followers call him.

'ALI

Jeer not at this "Bab" for it may be through this Gate that we enter the Way.

AKBAR

Way of Destruction!

AMIN

(*shifting uncomfortably*)

Destruction! Why destruction?

AKBAR

Do you not know that he declares that the official religion, that the established religion of our forefathers, must give way to his teachings?

SALIH

But on what grounds?

'ALI

He insists that the message of truth is never final, but must ever be renewed in accordance with the needs and development of man.

AKBAR

Why! If these impious words were true, the forms of belief would change and the infallibility of the priesthood be destroyed! No! Religion is final, and Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets; as we are the anointed ones, the guides of the people, I therefore say that whoever harkens to the words of this young heretic enters the way of destruction and damnation. May God assist us to eradicate this evil!

(*rises nervously and walks up and down.*)

'ALI

You also know the answer to your words, for you have heard it from my lips.

AKBAR

I acknowledge that you are skilled in the art of sophistry, but I do not wish to discuss the subject further. It makes my blood boil with righteous indignation!

'ALI

Toleration is a virtue, my revered Mulla; so permit me to continue to speak of this with our friends here present.

(AKBAR *shrugs his shoulders and soon after disappears from view.*)

SALIH

Why be impatient, revered doctor? Words, if true, will find echo in the hearts of men; or, if false, will fade upon the air.

(*He turns towards* 'ALI.)

Well, loved brother, tell us why our religion is not final.

'ALI

How good it is to find a listening ear, for many are deafened by fear or pride.

AMIN

(*interrupts with satisfied complacency*)

I have been always an eager watcher, a listener intent; but speak.

'ALI

Religions are diversified expressions of one Truth; they must be renewed by a succession of universal Prophets, who show forth this one Truth in the forms best suited to the ages in which they live.

SALIH

So you think religions must change to accord with the evolution of humanity?

'ALI

Surely! Truth cannot be final with regard to us, for we, as we develop, more fully understand; and does not our growth in knowledge increase our capacity to receive?

AMIN

Most logical, most logical!

'ALI

The Prophets work all together for they have one aim, and they follow one law. They differ only in the application of that law.

SALIH

Still, Christ, did he not break the sabbath and change the Mosaic law of divorce? Was not that enough to perplex the Jews?

'ALI

Not if they had been seekers after the reality instead of obstinate slaves of habit. Verily the changed times had new requirements, which necessitated putting aside the exoteric law; the esoteric law remained the same.

(*During the latter part of this conversation knocking at the gate is heard.*)

## SCENE II

*Enter* MUHAMMAD, HUSAIN *and* 'ABDU'L-WAHAB.

MUHAMMAD

Peace be upon you!

ALL

Upon you be peace!

SALIH

Welcome to my humble garden, which, until your coming, was unadorned, but now is enriched by your presence!

HUSAIN

Your hospitality is as vast as your generous heart, and my stay in Qaswin has been made so alluring that, if duty did not bid me depart, I should fain not journey further.

AMIN

Eh! Husain, were I the son of the Mayor of Tihran I should feel free not to bend to duty!

MUHAMMAD

We stopped for you on our way to the mosque, that we might all walk thither together.

AMIN

Sweet thought—to make the road to sanctity less long and lonely; but it is yet early, tarry a while, and drink some fragrant tea.

(*all seat themselves.*)

HUSAIN

Where is your honoured guest, Akbar, my future fellow-traveller?

'ALI

He walked toward the harem, sending Nasir before him to carry the news of his coming.

AMIN

Indeed a model husband!

SALIH

Liala is broken-hearted at Akbar's change of plan, for now she cannot accompany him on his pilgrimage to Mecca.

MUHAMMAD

Why, has he decided to leave here long before the month of pilgrimage ?

SALIH

Yes.

'ALI

Such a disappointment will increase her ill-health, the more, as she suspects that Akbar desires to take another bride.

SALIH

Fortune favouring him, he would wed Husain's youthful sister, rich in gold, position, and beauty.

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

He is wise to consider his own good pleasure, and journey with Husain.

MUHAMMAD

Women are always safer at home ; the less they see, the better ; blessed is the custom that keeps them veiled and apart from men !

'ALI

But then how can they develop and become companions for man ?

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

They see their near relatives : that suffices ; further freedom would lead to immorality.

'ALI

Knowledge guards virtue better than constraint.

MUHAMMAD

Women lack sound judgment; they must be guided and not permitted to decide for themselves. There is my wife, Qurratu'l-'Ain, who journeyed to Karbala and dwelt many months in that sacred city. Did she become more firm in faith, more enlightened? God forbid! She mistook night for day and vice for virtue; she has turned from the faith of her fore-fathers to follow an impious imposter!

'ALI

But Muhammad, consider; before condemning her you had better inquire more fully into the matter. Have not you, yourself, always loudly praised Qurratu'l-'Ain, as a model of virtue, and declared her understanding of the sacred books equal to that of the most learned Mujtahid in the land? Why now condemn her judgment?

SALIH

If only my daughter claimed herself to be the "Bab," the Gate of Knowledge, her claim I would believe.

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

Yes, revered father; I, too, know my sister to be wise, but now she is misguided. We must save her from herself; we must bring her back to her husband, and to the true religion!

MUHAMMAD

I bemoan the cruel folly which keeps her far from my home since her return from Karbala. I will not accept a Babi wife, but I would welcome a repentant woman.

'Abdu'l-Wahab

Cousin, you are in the right; we must exterminate this great evil!

'Ali

Again I ask you to investigate before condemning.

Muhammad

Is it not enough to know that this young heretic desires to extend the barriers of our religion and country to include the domains of the infidel?

'Abdu'l-Wahab
(*rising*)

Let us go to the mosque to hear your father warn the people.

Akbar
(*entering in anger*)

Verily, we must admonish the followers of Islam to take up arms against the enemy of Allah and of the Prophet, for he is a menace to faith, nation, and home!

Amin

You seem terribly in earnest.

Akbar

Yes, unto death I swear enmity against this pretended "Bab" and against his followers! Even though they be of my own kindred, I swear that I will hound them to death or to repentance!

'Ali

A rash vow can bring no good to the speaker, and if this cause be of God it is above the threats of men.

AKBAR

Are you one of this despised sect that you ever speak in their favour ?

AMIN

(*jokingly*)

Your attitude invites confidence.

(*Ali walk toward the garden gate.* 'ALI *and* AMIN *bring up the rear, talking together.*)

Akbar's anger grows ever more intense; something he heard in the harem, perhaps.

'ALI

So it appears. Probably Qurratu'l-'Ain reproached him for neglecting his wife and for trying to win Husain's sister.

## SCENE III

(*Women enter, clad in garments of varied hues, and bear off the samovar to a corner of the garden. They sit in a circle on the ground. Their voices sound like the twittering of many birds.*)

*Enter* DAIA, LAILA. *Later* FATIMA, QURRATU'L-'AIN *and* BASHIR.

DAIA

Mulla Akbar took you to wife because it is seemly for a man of God to protect an orphan, and you should therefore show deep gratitude.

LAILA

If he was so kind, then, why is he so unkind, now ? He promised to take me with him to Mecca : must not a man of God keep his promise ?

DAIA

Folly, child! a man cannot be held responsible for a promise given when he is under the influence of woman. (*musingly*) The applause he got for marrying an orphan has died out now. He has to find other means to attract the attention of men.

LAILA

But why ?

DAIA

To become Mujtahid; and you should not be a hindrance to him in his great ambition. You should be a loving, silent wife, desirous of bearing everything for the good pleasure of your lord.

(FATIMA *joins them.*)

FATIMA

What has your master decided, fair Laila ? Will he remain to make the pilgrimage with you in due season ?

LAILA

No, Fatima, my husband leaves me here. But my grief will be less bitter because, though I am only a distant relative, your loving hospitality has made me feel that this is my home.

(*weeps and walks away.*)

FATIMA

Did you not tell Akbar that such a shock may shatter her frail life ?

DAIA

I did, but I suppose he knows better than you or I what are his own wishes.

FATIMA

Did not Qurratu'l-'Ain speak to him ?

DAIA

Indeed, she did; and in a most unwomanly manner.

FATIMA

She could not have been unveiled before him.

DAIA

No, not bold to that extent, but when addressing man she seems not to remember the inferiority of woman. She dared bid him follow duty instead of ambition, and even said that it is vanity to go to holy places unless the heart is holy. Young women are changing. In my day they were silent and submissive.

(*they walk on.*)

(QURRATU'L-'AIN *enters slowly; her head is slightly bent and her fingers count her beads; she stops, slips the tasbih over her wrist, and takes a heavy-headed rose into her hand; bending, she breathes into it deeply.* FATIMA *rises from the circle of women and comes toward her and lays her head on her shoulder;* QURRATU'L-'AIN *looks up from the flower into the beautiful up-turned face; smiling, she presses her lips on* FATIMA'S *forehead and gently strokes her long, dark hair. The women are alike* QURRATU'L-'AIN *is sterner and paler; her sister, sweeter and fresher.*)

FATIMA

What vision appears to you in the splendour of this spring morning, Qurratu'l-'Ain ?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

From all sides I see new life rising; the struggle between the hardened soil and the maturing seed is over. Soon, upon all things, summer will spread victorious beauty!

FATIMA

But it will fade with autumn leaves and fall under the chill breath of winter, and winter holds all beings fast in crystallized forms.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Still, even the end has a beginning, for spring will again conquer, sister mine. So, when, as now, ancient faiths have become rigid in cold dead forms, a new faith germinates in the souls of men.

FATIMA

You believe that Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab, has transformed the season of dead faith into a spiritual springtime?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Yes, he is the founder of a new era; men will receive fresh disclosures of truth through his teachings.

FATIMA

Why is truth not given once for all?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Because relativeness and evolution are laws of the universe; you must think of the world as a great school, where, from time to time, new teachers and new instructions are needed. All great teachers strive to accomplish the same end—to perfect man.

BASHIR
(*entering*)

Honoured mistress, Mulla Muhammad is hastening here and would speak with you in private.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Bid him enter, the ladies are going.
(*exeunt women.*)

## SCENE IV

MUHAMMAD *enters hastily.*

MUHAMMAD

Qurratu'l-'Ain, while my father was denouncing the Babis and exhorting the worshippers to take up arms against them, I left the mosque, and hastened hither to warn you against the danger of adhering to your scandalous faith; and to make a final appeal to you, to return to my home—our home. Think of the time we have lived apart. Why this cruel separation? for have we not all things to bring us together?—youth, kindred . . . .

QURRATU'L-'AIN

You are intolerant. Look no further for the reason of our disunited lives; I am ever ready to live with you, but you will not let me.

MUHAMMAD

Why, my beloved, I yearn for you! Never for a moment have I been resigned to this cruel separation.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Then why prolong it ?

MUHAMMAD

I cannot permit my wife to be a Babi; I cannot have her bring shame and ridicule into my respected home. Even now I am jeered at on all sides for not having yet divorced you. Reflect ! must not the power of my love be great, to have prevented me from putting you aside under all this accusation?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

If you would free yourself from fear of public opinion you would find peace and happiness. Ah ! if you would only listen to me and follow the decree of your own freed judgment !

MUHAMMAD

The world's judgment is my judgment; think not, my misguided wife, that your words will unbalance my mind. I am right, for public opinion is with me.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Public opinion rarely apprehends either the end or the beginning.

MUHAMMAD

Say not foolish words, woman; if you had but seen, a few moments ago, the eyes of the worshippers flash with anger at the bare mention of the false Bab, you would appreciate the force of public opinion.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

But when it rests on a basis of ignorance it must surely crumble.

MUHAMMAD
(*pursuing his thought*)

While my father was representing the vileness of this imposter, cursing him as a son of perdition . . .

QURRATU'L-'AIN
(*interrupting*)

Ah! he did that! he calumniated that saint! (*She seems to enter a visionary state.*) I see his mouth fill with blood, for an evil curse brings punishment upon the lips of the speaker. I foresee men full of hate hounding the innocent followers of the Bab, trying to crush the hearts of the Faithful. I foresee the Faithful dying with the prayer of forgiveness on their lips. I foresee persecution and the fury of oppression over all our country. I foresee little children, old people, women, and men, tortured for their conviction. I foresee multitudes, multitudes of killed, testifying that they have conquered, though they are dead! But ah! I see those who will really suffer—the murderers, those who have the hiss of hate in their hearts!

MUHAMMAD

Qurratu'l-'Ain, are you going mad? What do you mean about my father?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Listen! law governs all; those who go against the law are crushed into obedience. Taqi opposes the truth: he will attract to himself the consequence of this action. It is inevitable.

MUHAMMAD

Cease these idle words and answer me. Will you abandon this degrading belief and come back to my home ?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Hear my pleading, Muhammad, allow me to speak to you of this great Cause, and be a ready listener; then shall our lives be transformed, and together we will uplift the souls of men to vast realities !

MUHAMMAD

Not one word more will I hear upon this subject !

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Then let me live silently by your side, showing you by my life the beauty of the Bab's commandments.

MUHAMMAD

We cannot be together unless you openly deny this belief; my wife must be spotless before all men!

(*During these words an uproar arises in the city; it grows, nearer and nearer, louder and louder; the gate is burst open and in rushes* AMIN.)

## SCENE V

*The same. Afterwards* AKBAR, NASIR, SHIRAZI, HUSAIN *and Soldiers.*

AMIN

Horror ! Horror ! Your revered father has been killed.

MUHAMMAD

What ! What mean these words ?

AMIN

On the road that leads from the mosque, at the turning, a dagger was thrust into Taqi's mouth and he fell dead.

AKBAR

(*entering*)

The three assassins have been arrested; they are Babis, and followers of your wife!

MUHAMMAD

(*to* QURRATU'L-'AIN, *who has veiled herself at the entrance of* AMIN.)

Deny your association with them!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

They cannot be the murderers.

AKBAR

Strange that when Taqi spoke openly against this vile sect, that same hour he was silenced forever.

MUHAMMAD

If you recant not, I clearly see that it is you who have prompted this act; for do I not remember your words : "I see his mouth fill with blood"? Deny, if you can!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

I spoke of an universal law of retribution, not of the plot of a criminal.

MUHAMMAD

Before you all, I repudiate her ! I repudiate her ! I repudiate her ! (*Turning to* AMIN.) Where have they borne my martyred father ?

AMIN

I will lead you to him.

(*Retires with* MUHAMMAD.)

AKBAR

Justice will decree that you be severely punished for this foul act, and your three accomplices killed!

SHIRAZI

(*rushing in*)

They are all guiltless, it is I who stopped his blasphemy from bursting forth anew. Give freedom to the innocent, and take me in their stead!

AKBAR

So you also are of this despised sect ? Your self-accusation may be a trick to save your comrades.

SHIRAZI

No, they could not have slain Taqi, for many saw them in the court of the mosque while I was waiting at the turning of the lane with this, ready in my grasp!

(*Shows his bloody dagger.*)

AKBAR

(*to Nasir*)

Go, bring the guards! (*Turning to* SHIRAZI.) Then you received orders from Qurratu'l-'Ain to do this act ?

SHIRAZI

I came here at dawn to give her news from afar, but saw her not. The words of Taqi angered me, and I decided then to slay him before his proclamation ; failing that, after his denunciation I silenced him forever !

AKBAR

So the Babis conquer their enemies by murdering them, and this is how you would regenerate the world !

SHIRAZI

In this then do I practice the law you preach : "We are commanded to kill the infidel."

QURRATU'L-'AIN

But in our faith, we are to conquer the enemy by wisdom and love ; and you, Shirazi, have done wrong in following the injunctions of the past.

AKBAR
(*ironically*)

Can a disciple of the Bab err ?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Know that even disciples of the truth may be ignorant at first, and harm the very cause they cherish.

AKBAR

The world's regeneration you preach will indeed be slow in coming.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

It cannot be accomplished in a day, for only through repeated effort can man rise above habit and passion. Yet, to this noble task must we devote our lives.

HUSAIN

(*entering with soldiers*)

I have heard that the self-accused murderer is here.

AKBAR

Yes, this is the wretch! Soldiers, take him to prison to join the other three assassins. They shall all be executed at the same time!

SHIRAZI

But they must be freed! They are innocent. I, alone, am guilty.

AKBAR

All four shall die, and I only wish that at the same time, all the Babis might be exterminated!

HUSAIN

But, justice . . . .

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Farewell Shirazi, learn to die with gentleness in your heart, rather than violent retribution. The old war-like age must give place to peace, patience and wisdom.

HUSAIN

(*half to himself as he gets a glimpse of* QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *face*)

How beautiful she is—how courageous !

QURRATU'L-'AIN

(*continuing*)

The sword must be sheathed, and our arms extended to all humanity!

CURTAIN.

# ACT II

## QASWIN

## ORIENTAL LIVING-ROOM
## IN
## QURRATU'L-'AIN'S FATHER'S HOUSE

## ACT II

SCENE—*The room is ornamented with very blue tiles, heavy beams, and lattice of sombre wood. The hangings and rugs blend in soft colours, and jugs and many brass ornaments shine out boldly.* FATIMA *is seated on the window-sill looking out into the garden of roses. Old* BASHIR *is near-by.* LAILA *is lying on a heap of pillows on the floor; her flashing eyes, her flushed then pallid face, denote that death is claiming her. By her side is* DAIA *holding an infant; she rocks to and fro crooning a fantastic song, a song which causes the sick woman to shudder with the fear of death.*

### SCENE I

DAIA, LAILA, FATIMA, BASHIR. *Later* QURRATU'L-'AIN.

DAIA

(*chanting monotonously*)

Woman has two masters,
Woman is never free;
Body and soul she is captive,
Caught in the net of fatality.
See this dimpled infant,
She too will be a maid,
In full freshness of her beauty
She will be wedded to a male.
Woman has two masters,
Woman is never free;
Little by little her flesh fades
From the weight of maternity.
Soon her spirit shrivels
In flaming jealousy,
For other maidens give her lord
The fatal joy she lost by him.

Woman has two masters,
Woman is never free;
Little by little, age or grief
Will take her to her other lord,
Stern death. He will clasp her
In arms of crushing bone;
His eyes are dim, his lips are cold,
And his couch is the mouldy grave.
Woman has two masters,
Woman is never free;
For if her first lord so desires
In Paradise she is his wife;
But if him she displeased,
Her ghost wanders in Hell;
The djynns, the ravens of the soul,
Hover around her in her plight.
Woman has two masters,
Woman is never free.

LAILA
(*moaning*)

Ah! verily, in these words do I see my life: I am an abandoned wife, I am nearing death. My poor little one may grow up to meet the same fate. Woe unto woman, for she is the slave of man, and man is ruled by his changing passions!

DAIA

It is not your place to misjudge your lord. He has done that which is legal and pure in the sight of men. Rather turn your eyes upon yourself and attend to the safety of your own soul.

LAILA

Ah, how?

DAIA

I know of an enchantment that can perhaps give you rest. I will try. Let me have all your ornaments of gold. I shall put them into the boiling drug. *(Detaches ornaments from the dying woman, reciting incantation.)* Gold can gilt the imps of darkness to a better hue . . .

FATIMA

(*approaching, interrupts* DAIA'S *incantation.*)

Cease these idle words, and leave Laila in peace!

DAIA

My words are holy words learned from the lips of a dervish wise in the art of enchantment, and through this knowledge I am trying to safeguard the soul of this woman from a fatal destiny and from the evil spirits which have pervaded this house since the impious act of murder instigated by Qurratu'l-'Ain.

(FATIMA *kneels beside* LAILA. DAIA *goes to the back of the room where she prepares a strange mixture in a large pewter bowl, but is careful to conceal the gold ornaments in her garment instead of putting them into the drug.*)

LAILA

What hope is there for me in the after world now that my husband has put me aside for his newly betrothed? If I cannot keep him here, why should he claim me there? (*Looking hopefully toward* DAIA.) Perhaps she can help me to escape from Hell.

FATIMA

Heed not the foolish mutterings of this old nurse. Hell and Paradise are not places, but states of your own soul. Akbar is not master of your soul, Laila; it is free from his power and obeys your own desire. You must desire all that is noble and beautiful and it will be yours, for creation is an endless bounty.

LAILA

I hear too late your words of hope and consolation.

FATIMA

The only thing that can render you powerless is despair in the might of Allah. Despair not in the might of Allah, gentle child.

LAILA

But everything is hidden from me. I stand alone in a barren wilderness of ignorance. My mind is weak and untrained. I hardly know what it is I seek. I merely want to be happy!

FATIMA

This desire for happiness is a sign of immortality.

LAILA

Is no one ever content in this world?

FATIMA

Everything on earth attains to its fullness, except man: he who is the greatest work of nature is incomplete, unless there is an hereafter in which he can develop to his full capacity; nothing but this, could satisfy his restless desires.

LAILA

Is this divine restlessness in the hearts of all?

FATIMA

Yes, for even a saint continues to yearn for a closer communion with the Divine Beloved; and the sinner is unconsciously seeking this same Divine Beloved.

LAILA

But can he find Him on the road of sin?

FATIMA

No, he will learn bitterly that his ideal is not in the earthy path in which he grovels, and he will seek on and on till he finally discovers the secret road. So you see that in reality all humanity is seeking the Divine Beloved. Union with this Desired One can alone bring happiness.

LAILA

Ah! I begin to understand—I begin to understand.

FATIMA

Truth cannot remain hidden, and that which you know not now, you will learn hereafter, for development continues in the worlds of the spirit. No soul remains in one condition. Not to advance is to go backward. But the willing soul's progress is endless.

LAILA

The horizon becomes vaster as we ascend.

FATIMA

Yes, spiritual activity is the very reason of existence. Now rest in peace, sweet child, for your awakening is at hand; your purity and your suffering will attract to you much that is priceless.

LAILA

Your words have soothed me, your words have helped me!

(LAILA *sleeps.* DAIA *approaches with pewter bowl, drops in a red hot coal, great blue flames spring up.*)

FATIMA

Extinguish that flickering flame. It will disturb the slumberer.

DAIA

It is a wonderful flame, full of magical influence, and will chase away the spirits of darkness. In the name of the Prophet, I command . . .

FATIMA

Cease! and know that such charms spring only from the imaginations of people brainsick or impostors! They are foolish superstitions that have nothing in common with the teachings of the Prophet. Turn from these useless fancies to the truths of your own religion. If you will not accept anything new, at least remain faithful to the verities of the past.

(BASHIR *carries away the flaming bowl trying to extinguish it.* DAIA *rushes after him. Just then* QURRATU'L-'AIN *enters and restrains her from snatching the bowl.* DAIA *goes out, muttering.*)

DAIA

Ah! I am defiled by the touch of an infidel! I am defiled. . . .

QURRATU'L-'AIN

She is wilfully ignorant; like a bat, the unseeing flees from the light of dawn.

FATIMA

Have you no news of our master, the Bab? I am so fearful.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

No. Your newly found faith gives you the anxiety of a little child.

FATIMA

I feel the storm is soon to burst, and the highest trees will suffer the greatest danger. Oh! Qurratu'l-'Ain, since the murder of Taqi your life is not safe.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Sh——! Since I accepted the Bab's message in Karbala I have held myself prepared to give my life for the Cause. The disciple follows his master. The Bab, who maintains such a claim against so many thousands of powerful men, knows that his days are in danger, and yet stands willingly in that position, so that all men may see more clearly their duty and his reality.

FATIMA

But is this total sacrifice necessary? absolutely necessary?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

The seed must sacrifice itself in the ground, so that the tree may spring from it. The personal life of a Prophet must end, so that his teachings may endure; therefore, sister mine, even though we hear that our master is slain, we must not waver. Know that the power of God cannot be overcome by man, and that the Bab, although dead, will live on in his teachings. Then, too, he has prepared us to expect another Manifestation even greater than himself!

FATIMA

But will he not come many years after us?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Be not certain of this, for the Bab has told us to be watchful, and a few of the older friends find wondrous signs of greatness in Baha'u'llah who lives in Tihran.

(*During this talk,* BASHIR *has gone into the garden to fill a jug of water. He returns with a large silk handkerchief filled with roses. He hands it to* QURRATU'L-'AIN, *who, untying it, finds a little pink note in the midst of the many roses which fall over her lap to the floor. She unfolds and reads the note.*)

BASHIR

Mulla 'Ali awaits the answer in the garden.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Our uncle wishes to see me at once and alone, for he bears an important message.

LAILA

Ah! Qurratu'l-'Ain . . . .

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Go to him, Fatima, and hear what he has to say. I will join you as soon as Laila is calmed.

LAILA

Ah! Qurratu'l-'Ain, I feel death's cold breath upon me. Take me into your warm arms.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Fear not, fair Laila; to you death comes as a deliverer, and through it you will enter the freer existence.

LAILA

Verily, I have nothing to live for, my life is broken; but my babe, my poor little one, must she live on? Must she remain behind to endure what I have endured?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Be at rest, Laila. When your daughter is grown, the lot of the Eastern woman will have begun to change. Soon she will be as free as the freest of her Western sisters, for the Bab demands the emancipation of woman all over the world, and the word of God must have effect!

LAILA

But shall I be conscious of the life left behind?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

We have a clear knowledge of all states beneath us. We lose nothing unless it is our wish to lose it, and as we advance in understanding our vision broadens. An atom is a world in itself: understand but one thing well, and it will become the key opening the treasure house of mysteries.

LAILA

Hold me closer, Qurratu'l-'Ain. Ah! my eyes burn like coals on fire!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Rest, Laila. I am near you and we shall never be parted.

LAILA

Hold me closer, closer to your beating heart. My heart is stopping . . . . it tightens . . . . Hold me closer to your living heart! . . . .

(*During this time* QURRATU'L-'AIN *tends her. She expires.* QURRATU'L-'AIN *kisses her gently.*)

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Tender flower snapped by a blow in the full freshness of life! Ah! Infinite Spirit of freedom and of might, hasten the hour of the world's deliverance from the slavery of ignorance and vice!

(DAIA *peeps in and sees* LAILA *dead. She raises a shrill call, and women rush in.*)

DAIA

Women! Women! Come hither. Laila is dead! Help me to bear her away from this place full of evil spirits, into yonder purer room.

(BASHIR *goes to restrain them, but* QURRATU'L-'AIN *stops him*).

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Let her do as she will, for resistance now is unavailing. Laila's soul is freed from the body; let them take the body away.

## Scene II.

Qurratu'l-'Ain. Fatima. *Later* 'Ali.

Fatima
(*returning from the garden*)

Ah! yonder wailing tells me that the women are lamenting over Laila's death.

Qurratu'l-'Ain

She glided peacefully into her new existence, for a ray of understanding had awakened her soul. What news do you bring from 'Ali ?

Fatima

The Bab is still held captive in the fortress of Maku, and it is feared that his confinement will become even stricter, and that soon we shall be unable to communicate with him.

Qurratu'l-'Ain

Our enemies are incensed: they see that this imprisonment has not chilled the ardour of his followers.

Fatima

Indeed, 'Ali says that many doctors of divinity have joined the Cause, thereby embittering the others who have sworn to kill all those openly professing our belief. Then he brings you a message from Tihran. We are alone, so let me wave to him to come to us.

(*Waves near the long window opening into the garden.* 'Ali *enters.*)

'ALI

Noblest of women. To-night you must escape from here to herald abroad the glad tidings of the Cause.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Your face signifies that your words are not spoken in jest. I am bewildered, for you know I am held a prisoner in my father's home. Why, and whither should I flee ?

'ALI

Hadi arrived at noon, sent by Baha'u'llah with orders to escort you to his house in Tihran. Baha'u'llah considers it unsafe that you should remain here, and you have a great work to perform, far from Qaswin! The principal Babi teachers are to meet in the Mazandaran—you must be among their number, and with your indomitable spirit help this great council. When dusk veils the sight of men, go hence to the city wall where Hadi will await you with horses.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

But my home claims me too.

FATIMA

For the Cause, you must go, Qurratu'l-'Ain! If you stay here, any day you may be sentenced to death. I will remain behind to carry out what you leave unfinished.

QURRATU'L-'AIN
(*addressing* FATIMA *lovingly*)

There are two kinds of lives: one is brilliant and evident; the other is hidden from fame, but is not less worthy before the True Seer.

(*kisses her sister. Voices are heard.*)

'ALI

(*withdrawing*)

I will see that the garden gate be left open for an hour after dusk. Go then, when you can.

## SCENE III

*The same. Enter* 'ABDU'L-WAHAB *and* QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *two* CHILDREN.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Ah, my little darlings, you bring brightness into the day with your smiling faces. Welcome, brother, are you well ?

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

Well, but sad; always very sad. We feel deeply the disgrace you have brought upon us, and we continue to beseech you to return to your ancient faith.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Can a man return to childhood ? The past and the present are different stages of one development. We love the past but can we return to it ?

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

Can we overthrow the religion of our forefathers for the presumptuous claim of a young imposter ?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

We do not wish to overthrow the religion of our forefathers; we desire to purify and to re-establish it in a vaster form.

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

Vaster form! Think of our mosques full of worshippers, think of the power and dignity of our priesthood; compared with the scanty group of Babis who have not even a house of worship. Do you expect wise men to listen to your folly?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Wise men know that the ancient tree will gradually decay and die, and that the small seed will develop, from a fresh shoot into a sapling, and in time become a mighty tree.

FATIMA

(*from near the window*)

At the appearance of an universal Prophet we see the end and the beginning, the completion of the old and the point of departure for the new.

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

(*to* QURRATU'L-'AIN)

You are held strangely firm in your belief, but so am I; and one of us must be in the wrong.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Not necessarily; you perceive a glimmer of truth, but the Bab unveils a spacious glory!

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

Do not play with words, Qurratu'l-'Ain, you are in the wrong. I beseech you to understand it and to free us all from this shame and impending danger. All things call you to us—comfort, fame affection, custom . . .

QURRATU'L-'AIN

But my sincerety bars the way.

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

You will repent when it is too late. (*Exit*)

(THE CHILDREN *who have been at the back of the scene playing with a falcon now run towards their mother.*)

CHILDREN

Mother, mother, tell us a story before auntie takes us away to play.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

What kind of tale, my darlings, will charm your little hearts?

CHILDREN

Tell us about . . . Well, anything you like.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Anything I like, well, . . . . In a country not far distant, there was a great and mighty city crowded with mosques, palaces, houses, bazaars, and hovels for the poor. Now, in the beginning, the city was not built like this, for then it had no hovels and had few palaces, and gardens were around each house. In those days the poorest home was full of sunshine and fresh air, but gradually the streets were narrowed and the most needy people lost their gardens, and even the palaces and the mosques became dingy, for their increasing number blocked out one another's light. Both luxury and poverty had become a powerful curse; the inhabitants sickened, many strange maladies appeared, and a doctor sufficiently skilled could not be found. In this city there lived a slender youth, strong of frame and of mind.

CHILD

What was he called ?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

His name was Sacrifice. Sacrifice was deeply pained by this state of affairs, and sought for the evil and for its cure. Soon he understood that through careless mismanagement the growing city had contracted upon itself instead of expanding over new lands, so the present narrow and unwholesome condition was the natural result of an unnatural state. The city would have to be remodelled and enlarged to suit the present need, and then the inhabitants would again become well and happy. All this he told to his fellow-citizens.

CHILD

How happy they must have been!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

No, for through ignorance or through personal interest they laughed him to scorn, for they were used to their homes and knew not what real health meant. But Sacrifice disregarded their jeers, and began to rebuild the city wherever it was most corrupt. This independence infuriated the others, and only a small number of people understood the wisdom of his motive and acts. These people followed his example and his instructions. Among them was a mother who realized that all the little ones would grow up to be sickly and miserable if the crumbling city was not rebuilt; so she too became an ardent worker. Now the scandal was great to see a woman labouring with men, and calling to others to join in the work of duty and love. Still she heeded not those who condemned her, for her heart was the heart of a mother and her strength was in the thought that all the little ones would be able to grow up into a happier life. Curses fell upon her ears like encouragements; she worked harder and harder, faster and faster. Through the veil of the present she saw a glorious future city, where space was endless, and beauty, freedom, and health, universal. There the wise were more wise, and the little ones had become big and strong . . . .

(QURRATU'L-'AIN *is deeply moved and* FATIMA *leads the children away after* QURRATU'L-'AIN *has kissed them long and tenderly.*)

FATIMA

Come, my darlings, come away.

CHILDREN

Why does mother weep? (*exeunt*).

(QURRATU'L-'AIN *advances towards the garden window, looks out into the gathering gloom. She wraps around herself a chadar, the long flowing outer garment worn by all Persian women, stops a moment on the threshold, and then disappears from sight.*)

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Twilight comes. Afar into the shadow of the night's black darkness, I see light. Onward! Outward!

(*Wailing of the women is again heard as she disappers into the garden.*)

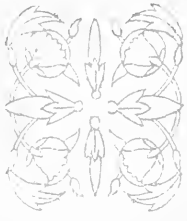
CURTAIN.

# ACT III

## BADASHT

MEADOWS TREES AND TENT

MID-DAY



## ACT III

## BADASHT

SCENE—*A group of men are seated in a meadow under the shade of a large tree; they are finishing their mid-day meal. To one side, and a little in the background, is a tent with closed curtains.*

### SCENE I

WALI, AMIN, HADI, 'ALI, *and other* BABIS.

WALI

This sherbet is fresh to my parched throat. I seem to have swallowed the whole desert on my way here.

AMIN

(*delighted at an excuse to drink more*)

In the name of Allah do I assist you to quench your thirst.

HADI

You have indeed brought us news of great import. So now, our beloved master, the Bab, has been transferred to a more inaccessible prison, and all communication is forbidden between him and us.

WALI

Each time we desired a message to reach the Bab, we had to try some new subterfuge. One time we would put a tiny note into an empty walnut shell and, placing it among other walnuts, bribe the guard to pass them to him in his cell. Again, would we wrap a letter in impermeable stuff, weight it, and drop it into a bowl of milk.

HADI

Everything can be borne but this separation! It is unworthy in us to stand by and see our master treated thus. We must march to his prison and demand his release.

WALI

Verily, it is our duty.

'ALI

If we carry out this undertaking in peace, it is well advised.

HADI

Then, this very day when all are gathered together, we must organize our campaign of deliverance and love.

WALI

Now tell me of the happenings here, at Badasht; it has become a center, a meeting place for all true Babis.

HADI

Yes, before the surging difficulties, together we discuss how best to spread the Cause.

'ALI

And the teachings of the Bab are being expounded by Baha'u'llah. What was obscure, becomes clear, through his words; what was hidden and cramped in our minds, he unfurls through the broadness of his understanding.

WALI

Verily, that is no news. As it was, so it continues.

AMIN

You have asked nothing of Qurratu'l-'Ain. She is our heart of flame, though a woman veiled, who sits apart in our gatherings.

'ALI

Yes, from behind the curtain of her seclusion her virile eloquence incites us on to forceful deeds.

WALI

Truly, I am anxious to hear of this wondrous woman. How did she escape from Qaswin? I have not heard the correct version of her flight, for some say that she wandered in the forest of Mazandaran, and finally arrived at Tihran, others that she went there directly.

AMIN

Baha'u'llah sent Hadi to bring her to Tihran.

HADI

Yes, I can give you the real account, for we escaped together from her native town.

WALI

Do relate it.

HADI

At nightfall I watched for her outside the city wall. The hour that followed crept slowly past. All sounds made my strung nerves quiver in anticipation. The waiting horses stamping their impatient feet, seemed to make the whole city resound, and every moment I feared that a sentinel might see me there before my charge had come. Suddenly, a rope was dropped from the wall, and quicker than hope, Qurratu'l-'Ain glided to earth. Her eyes flashed strangely, and her voice was deeply stirred. "On, On!" she said, "our work is ahead!" So great was her intent, that our cautious advance seemed to chafe her swift spirit!

WALI

As a mighty bird, when the cage is shattered, desires to soar aloft!

HADI

When we had reached the open road our horses started into a rapid gallop; our emotion urged them on. She spoke little during the whole journey to Tihran, where, when I had seen her safe into Baha'u'llah's house, my mission ended. Yet, I now feel sure that on this earth she cannot find safety. She is too prone to face danger and to court hardship.

'ALI

You speak truly; like all noble hearts, hers finds no rest when others are in torment and sorrow. Our salvation is to bring about the salvation of others. This is why we are commanded to help all men—the friend, the stranger, the believer, and the infidel.

A Babi

Still the stranger must remain the stranger, and the infidel the infidel, until they accept our religion and follow its law.

'Ali

It is only through love and kindness that the stranger becomes the friend.

A Babi

The Quran reads otherwise.

'Ali

The Quran addressed a wilder people who knew not the power of gentleness, for they had not been touched by the teachings of the Nazarine; but now the whole world is prepared to rightly appreciate the rule of love.

Amin

Still the Book of Muhammad will always be our guide.

'Ali

Must not each Prophet bring his special message?

A Babi

If you were not so holy, I would deem you sacrilegious.

'Ali

Why? Because I suggest that the Infinite Essence—God, has more than one word and one expression?

AMIN

(*restless and sleepy*)

The hour of mid-day slumber is shrivelling into nothingness, through your prolonged discussion. Let us go to rest and later meet again with refreshed spirits. Come, friends, sleep gives fair counsel.

(*The men withdraw,* 'ALI *and* AMIN *walk to the right.* BASHIR, *dusty and travel-worn, comes on the scene.*)

## SCENE II

'ALI, AMIN, BASHIR. *Later Hand-maiden and* QURRATU'L-'AIN.

'ALI

Is it really you, Bashir ?

AMIN

My amazement finds no expression!

BASHIR

I have attained at last my desire, for I am again near my mistress.

AMIN

How did you come ?

BASHIR

When Nasir, whose carelessness permitted Qurratu'l-'Ain to flee, was turned out by Mulla Muhammad, I begged her kind father to let me depart too. Together we journeyed to Tihran. There, Nasir fell into evil ways. I worked to get money for my journey hither; my progress was slow and months have passed since I left Qaswin.

'Ali

Your faithfulness is rewarded, for there is Qurratu'l-'Ain's tent.

Bashir

I have seen Qurratu'l-'Ain grow up from babyhood, and with years my love for her has increased in my heart. Ah! it was hard to be separated from her!

Amin

I, too, have known her long, and I love her well, but now I tremble at her undertaking, and fear her intrepid zeal and independent mind.

'Ali

Yes, I have seen her in the hour of danger, when courage envelopes her as flames a fluttering gauze.

Amin

Now I shall leave so you may approach her.

('Ali *claps his hands; a maiden soon raises the curtain of the tent, disappears quickly to give the news of* Bashir's *coming. Then* Qurratu'l-'Ain *comes out.* Bashir *falls at her feet, weeping.*)

Bashir

Mistress, mistress, again I see your lovely face. I am old, and I was fearful that the grief of separation would kill me before I had attained the joy of meeting.

Qurratu'l-'Ain

Faithful Bashir, did you come all that way alone and on foot?

BASHIR

The road was hard, but now that I have seen you I am at rest. I bear you tidings from home. Your noble sister is fervent and her virtues are attracting many to the Cause.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

And my little sons? . . . My father and brother?

BASHIR

All are well, but saddened by your flight. Fatima is devoted to your children and cherishes them like her own, but their father, by his fanaticism, destroys her influence.

'ALI

He will never forgive you for disregarding public opinion.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

My poor little ones! How I should love to bring you up with tender love and wise care! How, when weary, it would rest me, just for a moment, to lay my head against your fresh young faces—just for a moment! I should gain power from your innocence and weakness. But I must pass through life a mother without her children, a woman without her home, so that future families may become united in broader understanding.

'ALI

Yes, Qurratu'l-'Ain, you have broken the chain of custom, and set women free.

QURRATU'L-'AIN
(*to handmaiden*)

Take Bashir to rest.

(*As* BASHIR *goes away*, QURRATU'L-'AIN *addresses him.*)

Your faithfulness has brought me fortitude and your beautiful action gives me courage.

(*turning to* 'ALI)

Have you seen Baha'u'llah since last evening ?

'ALI

Yes, and he assures us that it is here, at Badasht, that the Cause is to be fully disclosed.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Welcome tidings! Then all the Babis will be forced to realize that not only must superstition be dislodged from the minds of the people, but that their ideas and customs must be regenerated. The advent of a Prophet is the Day of Judgment and of Resurrection!

'ALI

True; yet I fear that they will be bewildered when they understand that the Quran is no longer their only law, that priesthood is set aside, dogma and ritual abolished, woman liberated . . . .

QURRATU'L-'AIN

It is better for them to know all; understanding is the only foundation of unwavering love. Why, if they cannot accept even the full message of the Bab, how will they ever grow up to comprehend the fuller teachings of Baha'u'llah?

'Ali

Yes, you are right; we must prepare them without delay, for only the very few who have been associated intimately with Baha'u'llah understand the true meaning and outcome of Babism.

Qurratu'l-'Ain

What a privilege it is to listen to Baha'u'llah's wisdom! Yesterday, when I was in his presence with Quddus, he foretold the time when earnest, unselfish effort in art, science or trade would be man's great form of worship; how then, civilization and education would be directed and promoted universally by Houses of Justice.

'Ali

But, what are these Houses of Justice?

Qurratu'l-'Ain

Assemblies of the Faithful, to be elected from time to time by the people. Their mission will be to spread the knowledge and the justice of God.

'Ali

How will these Houses of Justice function?

Qurratu'l-'Ain

As local and as national councils; and there will be an universal one arbitrating between nations. Then, where will be poverty, ignorance and war? Men and countries will be as one through the power of brotherhood and science, and the renewed religion will transform the face of the globe.

'ALI

At last the desire of Zoroaster, of Buddha, of Christ, and of all the Prophets will be fulfilled, for they looked forward to the time when their teachings should finally result in one great Brotherhood!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

But not before the advent of this universal religion could it come to pass, for the Jew, the Buddhist, the Christian, the Muhammadan, and the Agnostic will not agree until they find the renunciation of Buddha, the sagacity of Moses, the love of Christ, the power of Muhammad, and the exactitude of Science, united in one vast whole—vast enough to satisfy all mentalities—vast enough to meet all conditions—vast enough to truly civilize mankind.

'ALI

I see Quddus leaving Baha'u'llah's tent: he is coming towards us.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

We will consult with him concerning the opportune time for disclosing the radical nature of the Bab's mission.

## SCENE III

*The same and* QUDDUS.

QUDDUS

Greetings to you, noble servants of a mighty Cause!

'ALI

Peace be upon you, most honoured of disciples!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

We are wondering if the moment of deeper initiation is now at hand.

QUDDUS

Yes, even tonight, Baha'u'llah will speak to us about this important matter.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Shall we go to him, or will he come to us here?

QUDDUS

He has not decided. Circumstance will designate the place.

'ALI

I will go to the men and continue to prepare them for the great awakening. They are like a lover so blinded by passion that he sees a fanciful creation instead of the true beauty of his beloved.

(*Exit* 'ALI.)

QUDDUS

Qurratu'l-'Ain, the decisive moment is at hand. As soon as the followers understand the real character of the Cause, a period of chaos will follow. Some will turn back and become our enemies, condemning our broad views; others will grasp the fuller teachings with eagerness; but this meeting at Badasht will be broken and consumed, and out of the ashes a Phœnix will arise!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

These days of happy comradeship have matured our hearts and our minds, Quddus; should destiny lead us apart, we shall yet not be separated. Your radiant spirit will always be with me, and I shall ever feel your presence.

QUDDUS

To me you will appear in the fragrance of flowers, in the brightness of days, in the mystery of nights, and in the fervour of my aspirations.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

These hours of meeting have been all joy to me; but, for us, love is above all separation.

QUDDUS

The void made in my life by this parting will speak to me with the voice of remembrance.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Our friendship is without stain. Our spirits can soar over all obstacles, and meet like two white eagles in flight, high above earth and clouds.

QUDDUS

You enforce my courage, you help me to serve men better.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

By looking through each other's eyes we have beheld the vision of a nobler beauty.

QUDDUS

Ah, may all humanity become as one great loving heart!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Voices are approaching. Fare thee well my valiant spirit! Now, make ready the hour of proclamation.

QUDDUS

I go, but I am never parted from you. Nothing can come between us; not distance, time, or the grave.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

No, nothing can ever come between us. (*Exit* QUDDUS.) Infinite, all-pervading power which we call God, come now to our assistance, let us be channels for your Truth, and grant all men acceptance of the whole message from our lips, for the Day of Judgment is at hand, it reigns in the heart of each man, and every man must choose for himself; either he must press on with the movement of progress, or be pushed aside by its onsweeping power.

(*She retires into her tent.*)

## SCENE IV

*Enter* 'ALI, HADI, AMIN, WALI, BABIS, *returning from their siesta. Later* BASHIR *and* QURRATU'L-'AIN.

'ALI

Religion, like all other things, must change. What was once fitting is so no longer. Polygamy, slavery, war were permitted in the past, but now, now can we righteously practice them? Sacrifices were acceptable, now they are of another kind.

A Babi

Of what kind ?

'Ali

They are now spiritual. Today we have to see the inner meaning of the symbol. We have to put the form aside, so that the living Verity may manifest itself anew in a wider world of expression, and guide men onward to a broader understanding of the Infinite.

A Babi

Your assertion is sweeping and sacrilegious, for at all events the law of Muhammad must endure for ever.

Wali

The outer form must pass away; but the inner law is eternal and is the spirit of all religions.

'Ali

The time of transformation has come, and through the appearance of the Bab we are entering the Day of Judgment—the Day of Resurrection.

Amin

Are you quite sure ? The trumpet has not sounded.

A Babi

There are no signs visible.

'Ali

They are inward and invisible. The outward signs recorded in the Holy Books are symbols; to interpret them literally would be useless and impossible.

HADI

The end of the old world of dogma has come with the dawning of this faith.

(BASHIR, *who had gone in the direction of* BAHA'U'LLAH'S *tent, now returns to deliver the following message to* QURRATU'L-'AIN, *who is standing near the opening of her tent listening attentively to the men's discussion.*)

BASHIR

Baha'u'llah is not well and says that you are to come to him for the meeting.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

I shall go to him at once.

(*continues listening*)

'ALI

Soon we shall leave Badasht: let us leave it filled with the Gospel of life! Let our lives show what we, sincere Muhammadans, have become through our acceptance of the Bab, the Mahdi, who has awakened us to the esoteric meaning of the Resurrection Day. Let us fill the souls of men with the glory of the revealed word. Let us advance with arms extended to the stranger. Let us emancipate our women, reform our society. Let us arise out of our graves of superstition and of self, and pronounce that the Day of Judgment is at hand; then shall the whole earth respond to the quickening power of regeneration!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

*(deeply moved and half to herself)*

I feel impelled to help unveil the Truth to these men assembled. If my act be good the result will be good: if bad, may it affect me alone! *(Advances majestically with face unveiled, and as she walks towards* BAHA'U'LLAH'S *tent, addresses the men.)* That sound of the trumpet which ushers in the Day of Judgment is my call to you now! Rise, brothers! The Quran is completed, the new era has begun. Know me as your sister, and let all barriers of the past fall down before our advancing steps. We teach freedom, action, and love. That sound of the trumpet, it is I! that blast of the trumpet, it is I!

*(Exit* QURRATU'L-'AIN.)

A BABI

Shame, that a naked-faced woman dares to appear in our midst, and to speak such words!

AMIN

*(to* 'ALI)

Hasten to Baha'u'llah to receive his condemnation of this unheard of act! She will wreck the Cause.

A BABI

Woe to us that we have been led to this—to hear such words, and to see such a spectacle!

AMIN

Free thought has brought forth this uncontrolled act.

A Babi

Shame upon us to have esteemed this woman! She is evil. Has she not repudiated the Quran? Has she not cast aside the sacred veil, and violated purity by claiming that men and women must mingle together freely like brothers and sisters?

Amin

What conduct! What conduct!

A Babi

What blasphemy, to say that her voice is the summons of the trumpet ushering in the Day of Judgment!

('Ali *returns breathless with haste, in his hand an open Quran.*)

'Ali

Baha'u'llah's answer is to read the sura describing the Day of Judgment.

A Babi

Then he upholds her in her shame and blasphemy?

'Ali

(*reads, sometimes his voice is drowned by the turmoil; some of the men go away, one kills himself, others appear triumphantly happy.*)

"When the day that must come, shall have come suddenly . . . "

Amin

Where shall we go, to whom shall we turn?

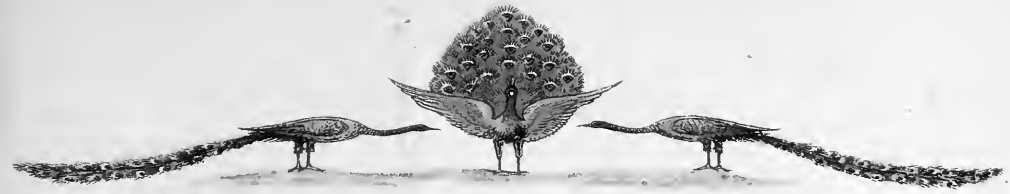
A Babi

Accursed be Badasht—scene of disgrace and degradation!

'Ali

"Ah, how happy shall be the people of the right hand! And the people of the left hand; oh! how wretched shall be the people of the left hand!"

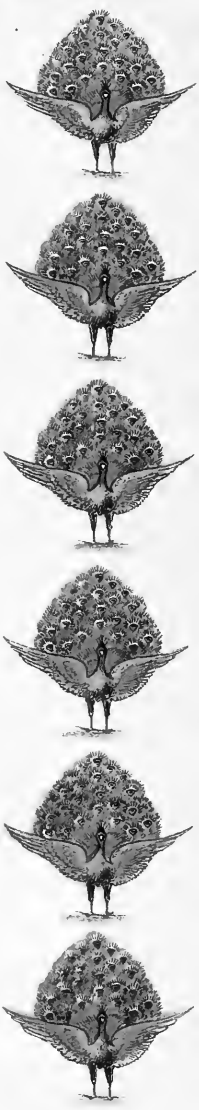
CURTAIN.

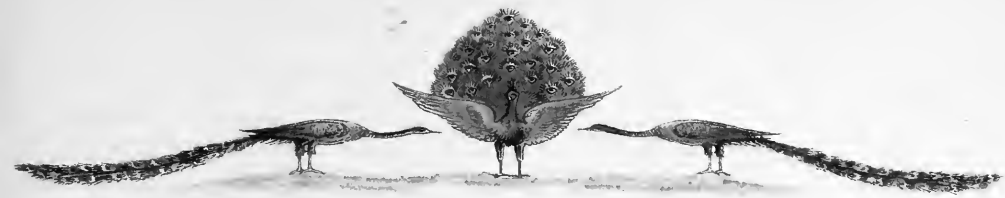


# ACT IV

## TIHRAN

## HALL OF FESTIVITIES
## IN
## THE KALANTAR'S HOUSE





## ACT IV

SCENE—*A spacious hall in the* KALANTAR'S *house.* QURRATU'L-'AIN *is seated near the fountain writing. She stops to read aloud what she has just composed. Before she finishes,* HUSAIN *enters.*

### SCENE I

QURRATU'L-'AIN, HUSAIN, *and later* RUHANGIS.

QURRATU'L-'AIN
(*reading*)

"To convene the guests to his feast of love all night
from the angel host above,
Peals forth this summons ineffable: 'Hail, sorrow-
stricken community'!"

HUSAIN

I came to see my sister. May I remain and speak with you?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Most certainly, noble youth.

HUSAIN

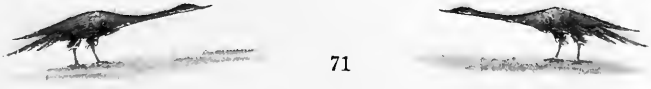
For many months past, ever since my return to Tihran, I have been seeking an opportunity of talking to you alone and freely.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

You have?

HUSAIN

Of a truth. Your captivity in my father's house has aggravated this desire; but how could I break through the network of custom and vigilance, not knowing if you would permit me to approach you?



QURRATU'L-'AIN

So you are my friend!

HUSAIN

Ah! since our first and only meeting at Qaswin, constant thoughts of you have filled my memory and all slander I have heard about you has left no trace upon my mind.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Your good will must be sincere indeed, for many are the tales related of me.

HUSAIN

To none that I hear will I give credence. Your virtue is as evident as the radiance of the sun. Did I not see you when you were charged with instigating Taqi's death?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Have you never doubted my uprightness?

HUSAIN

Never!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

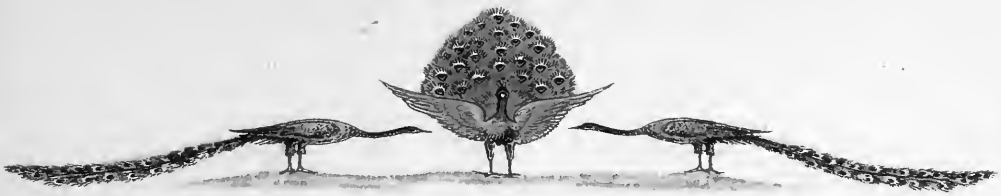
Not even after the stories told about me at Badasht?

HUSAIN

No, never!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

But have you not heard how I am accused of having provoked a terrible scene of debauch at Badasht by entering a meeting of men unveiled, and of having thereby ruined the very Cause I was trying to serve?





HUSAIN

All this has been told me; but I know too, that, after that meeting, the leader of your sect upheld you by giving you the new name "Tahira," that immaculate name "The Pure." He must have known you better than scandal-mongers.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

(*meditatively*)

How quickly we were all dispersed after the council of Badasht!

HUSAIN

What did really happen to Quddus after you left there?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Ah! Quddus! . . .

HUSAIN

Was he among the Babis who determined to go secretly to release their master?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

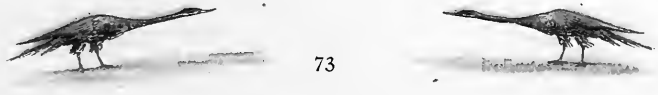
No. But when he heard that his comrades had been treacherously attacked by their escort in the forest, and had escaped only by taking refuge in the tomb of Shaykh Tabarsi, he went at once to reinforce them in their improvised stronghold.

HUSAIN

Was that your final parting?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Yes. Our final parting on earth.



HUSAIN

I have heard how valiantly that handful of men resisted the imperial troops for over five months; and I have often wondered how they were finally overcome.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Why! do you not know? The commander promised them a safe conduct if they would surrender, and confirmed his word of honour by vows pledged on the Quran.

HUSAIN

And they accepted ?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

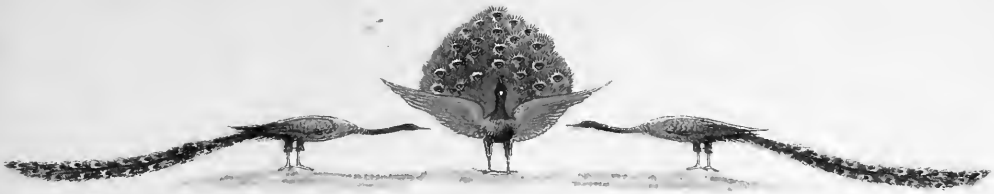
Yes, hunger was preying on their very bones, no resource was left to them, so the soldiers of God evacuated their fort, and under the flag of truce marched slowly into the enemy's camp. Now hear how the commander respected his honour and his vows ! On the morrow when they had laid their arms aside to partake of food, the troops were ordered to fall upon them with sword and knife.

HUSAIN

How cowardly ! How currish !

QURRATU'L-'AIN

But the leaders were spared to grace the triumphal return of the commander of the imperial troops, and the foremost of these was Quddus. When they reached the city he was given into the clutches of the most important doctor of divinity who tortured him with his own hands and finally killed him with an axe. The shame of it—the shame of it !





HUSAIN

(*with great feeling*)

Qurratu'l-'Ain! . . . Tahira! . . . And where were you during this cruel massacre?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

At Nur. After the slaughter of my comrades, eyes were turned toward me . . . Was I, too, not dangerous? Yes, a peril to men, and a shame to womanhood. Accordingly I was brought to Tihran, and put into your father's custody, and here—even here, I am suspected of continuing my pernicious work.

HUSAIN

Gossip and slander have no weight in the balance of a just mind.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

(*smiling*)

Perhaps you, too, are losing your reason through my mysterious art.

HUSAIN

Your art—I know what that is. You have led me from flat indifference to towering desire. You are awakening what is best in me. I love you, Quarratu'l-'Ain. I love you with all the ardour of my heart. (QURRATU'L-'AIN *rises to go.*) No, you will listen, for you are good and will not condemn a sufferer to silence when speaking can ease his pain.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

I am not indifferent nor scornful. I know you are sincere. But you will have to learn to love me as I wish to be loved, and to understand me as I wish to be understood.

HUSAIN

We do not speak each other's language . . . But I have something even more important to say to you. Since that crazed Babi made an attempt on the life of His Majesty, the Shah . . .

QURRATU'L-'AIN

What an outrageous act ! How misguided !

HUSAIN

His co-religionists are being sought out, and I fear that the time is approaching when the whole community will have to pay for the folly of one or two of its members. Danger is hovering around you like a sinister bird of prey: you must consent to flee with me.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

A web of circumstance holds me here. Besides, in this house I am in less danger than elsewhere.

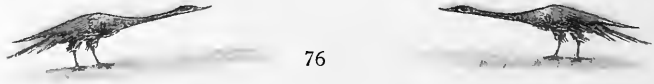
HUSAIN

I wish it were so; but alas! I cannot trust my father, for though he thinks you innocent, he has not the courage to set you free. He will fail us in the moment of need. Come away, Qurratu'l-'Ain. I will surround you with every tenderness, and you shall have a life of rest in a freer land.

RUHANGIS

(*enters crying*)

Ah ! Tahira, my heart shivers with fear, and tears blind my eyes; I do not wish to wed Mulla Akbar!



QURRATU'L-'AIN

Sh——! Sweet child. Why this sudden grief? For more than three years you have known of your betrothal and have not complained.

RUHANGIS

Even so; I gave no heed to such a distant time, but now that I am of an age to marry, ah! my grief is great, I am so full of dread!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Be calm, Ruhangis. We will speak to your brother.

RUHANGIS

(*lifting up her head and seeing* HUSAIN)

But I must not mention my feelings to my elders, it is considered shameful.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Come, come, dearie. You have spoken to me and I am not thirteen.

RUHANGIS

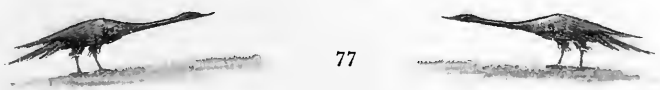
You are different, you have no age.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Such barriers should not exist between brothers and sisters, children and parents. Do not cry, little one, I will speak for you. Why is this marriage advisable, Husain?

HUSAIN

Akbar is an important man; it is customary that girls marry young; and they cannot choose for themselves, therefore their parents select suitable husbands for them.



QURRATU'L-'AIN

Go to my room, Ruhangis. I shall join you in a moment. (*Exit* RUHANGIS.) This man is unworthy of any honest woman, Husain, and Ruhangis is only an innocent child. She is too young to marry, she does not know what she is doing. Marriage without free-will is sinful. Akbar ill-treated his former wife, and is prompted now by greed and ambition. Oh ! if you can, save this little half sister from an assured life of misery.

HUSAIN

But you know that an engagement at this stage cannot be broken.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Marriage is beautiful when happiness attends it; it is not moral when there is neither love nor esteem. Which will you recoil before—the less, or the greater evil ?

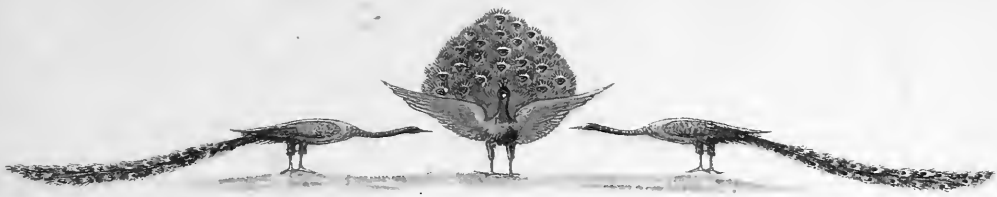
HUSAIN

I will do my best to change the will of my father, even though it bring upon us the enmity of Akbar; and I shall perhaps succeed, for she is my father's darling. But after . . .

QURRATU'L-'AIN

We can speak no further.

(*Exeunt.*)





## Scene II

*(Young girls and women enter and hurry to and fro in the large hall. Carpets and cushions are thrown upon the floor; long garlands of flowers are hung upon the pillars and under the suspended lamps.)*

*The* Kalantar's First Wife, *the* Kalantar's Second Wife, *Hand-maidens.*

Second Wife
(*directing the decoration*)

Make haste, maidens, the hour is swiftly passing, and soon the guests will arrive. No, put that carpet here. Leave that space for the dancer. Yes, all right. Hang the garlands under the lights.

First Wife
(*the possessor of an unfortunate temper which shows clearly in her face.*)

Then their beauty will not be seen.

Second Wife

It is better to have their freshness and fragrance enjoyed than to have them withered by the heat of the flames.

First Wife

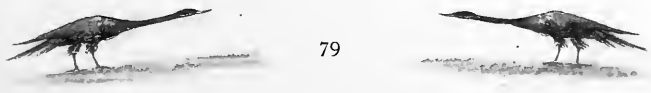
You always think that what you say is right.

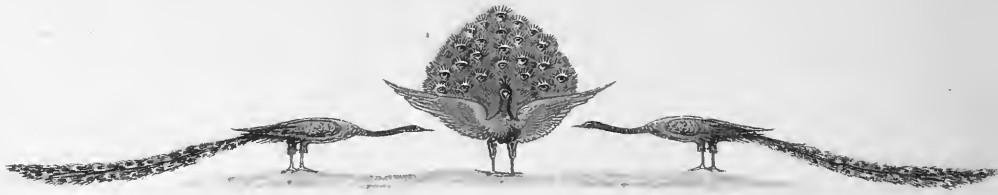
Second Wife

Otherwise I should not say it.

First Wife

Generally you are in the wrong, but that you will never admit.







SECOND WIFE

I cannot see my failings so quickly as you create them in your imagination. *(To maid who has come to ask her something.)* Yes, bring in the cakes.

FIRST WIFE

What! before the guests have come! They will think us foolish and I shall be classed with you as a bad manager. I, who am so skilled in the art of keeping house! I will not permit it. Slave, do not bring the cakes.

SECOND WIFE

Your insolent counter-order shall not be heeded. This festival is for the betrothal of my daughter and you have no right to raise your voice.

FIRST WIFE

I always have a right to raise my voice, for I am the Kalantar's first wife—the real head of the house, and you—you are an underling compared with me in my regal station.

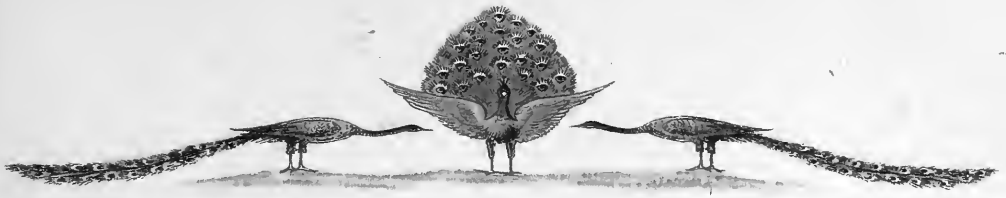
## SCENE III

*(During this discussion the guests have begun to arrive. Their chadars are folded in Eastern fashion and they advance and salute the wives and women present.)*

*The same. Guests. Later* RUHANGIS, *Dancer, Blind Musicians, and* QURRATU'L-'AIN.

FIRST WIFE

My heart is made joyous by your presence!





A Guest

My eyes have become illumined by the sight of your face!

First Wife

May my life be your sacrifice!

Second Wife

You grace our humble feast with all the beauty and splendour of Paradise! We are unworthy of such an honour.

A Guest

And where is the fair betrothed?

Second Wife

She is with Tahira in yonder room, and her maiden heart is fluttering like the wings of a hunted bird, and her eyes have turned into two springs from which tears flow; she is tremulous on the threshold of marriage. (*Guests are served with tea, sherbets, fruits.*)

A Guest

A most praiseworthy condition, for only bold and bad women show their joy at such moments. The noblest adornments for a virgin bride are fear and grief.

First Wife

She should not then be left with Tahira, who always tries to calm her weeping.

A Guest

Tahira believes, does she not, that a girl should wed only with free will and joy?

FIRST WIFE

Yes, she has unheard of views—many manias. She even writes poetry!

SECOND WIFE

Still we have all grown to love her; she is so bewitching.

A GUEST

But she is so bold and unwomanly. She demands for us women things we do not want for ourselves.

SECOND WIFE

She says that we do not yet know what we do want.

A GUEST

How impertinent!

SECOND WIFE

Here comes the bride elect!

WOMEN

(*from habit and appreciation*)

Bah! Bah! Bah!

A GUEST

How young she is; how timid! (RUHANGIS *bursts into tears.*)

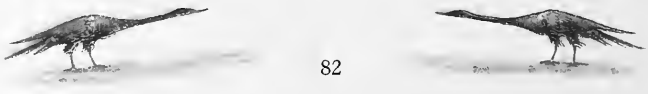
FIRST WIFE

Most laudable—most laudable.

SECOND WIFE

Let the music and dancing begin. It will soothe her grief.

(FIRST WIFE *looks startled when she sees that the musicians are men. She draws her veil around her and turns with disapproval to the* SECOND WIFE, *who addresses her impatiently.*)



SECOND WIFE

Why not? . . . They are blind.

FIRST WIFE

(*scrutinizing them through her drawn veil.*)

Are you quite sure?

(*The dancer sways her supple form, gently as the branch waves in the breeze. Her tiny, dark feet flutter as quickly as the rustling leaves. The music is minor, it is dreary, it is fiery, it expresses unworded sensations. The onlookers watch with increasing interest as they eat of the luscious fruit laid on huge platters before them. The music presses faster and faster, the tinkling of the dancer's anklets becomes louder and louder as she whirls more and more quickly, the golden coins in her long black braids twinkle brightly. She sways on with the panting rythm of the music. The women, captivated by the sight and sound, also sway to and fro, clapping their hands.* QURRATU'L-'AIN *has entered quietly and seated herself with a small group of women to whom she talks;* RUHANGIS, *tired of the dance, draws near and sits beside her. When the music subsides a little the clear voice of* QURRATU'L'AIN *can be heard addressing the women. Gradually others turn from the dancer and join* QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *group. The dancer also stops and creeps near, but the blind musicians continue to play during this scene.*)

QURRATU'L–'AIN

Then our hero brought up in the land of roses was taken to a distant clime where nature itself looks like a stony prison. There he was held captive many days, many weeks, many months!

RUHANGIS

(*who is huddled close to her beloved* QURRATU'L-'AIN, *divining who the hero is, exclaims under her breath*)

You speak of the Bab?

(*The other women who are further away do not hear, and by a sign to* RUHANGIS, QURRATU'L-'AIN *bids her listen quietly.*)

QURRATU'L-'AIN

His winsome face and form became livid and frail, for his confinement was tedious and severe. Gradually he won the hearts of those around him, and even from afar men came just to see the light in his prison window. One night the lamp was not lit. Again the next night the window was dark, and the eyes of the Faithful were dim! Our hero had been borne away to die; the eyes of the Faithful filled with tears! He was led into a large crowded place called the "Court of the Lord of the Age." He and a favoured disciple were suspended against the wall. A battalion of soldiers drew up before them; the guns were pointed. Then the disciple was heard to say "Master, are you pleased with me?" The answer was lost in the fire of hate which gushed from the steel muzzles, and then smoke clouded the spot. When it cleared, a marvellous thing appeared. The disciple was riddled with bullets, but our hero was untouched; only the ropes which bound him had been severed, and there he stood quietly before the awestricken men! He might then have turned the superstitious mob in his favour by advancing towards them and proclaiming chance to be a miracle, but he did not; he wished to

prove that spirit transcends death. The men, when they had recovered from their amazement, again secured him. A new battalion of soldiers was called, for the other, unnerved, had refused to fire again. During this inexpressible moment of hesitancy, God's hero looked upon the raging crowd of upturned faces with eyes of tenderness . . . were they not his misguided brothers? and had he not come to lead them to nobler realities by his life or by his death? . . . Again the fire of hate gushed forth, and a shroud of smoke enveloped the dead body of the hero of God. But the eyes of the friends were filled with light!

(*The women are deeply impressed; one or two are crying.*)

A Guest

What is the name of this great being?

Qurratu'l-'Ain

(*rising*)

It is he who has come to lead men to a wider truth; he is my lord and your master, Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab!

First Wife

Shame! shame! to have listened to your unholy words!

Qurratu'l-'Ain

You weep over fiction, and repulse reality.

Second Wife

Let us go to see the bride's display of gifts. It will chase away these dismal and unwelcomed thoughts.

(*Exeunt women*)

## Scene IV

Qurratu'l-'Ain, Husain.

Husain
(*rushing in*)

Terrible news—dare I utter the indescribable tidings!

Qurratu'l-'Ain

Speak, speak! In the name of Allah, speak!

Husain

The slaughter of the Babis has already begun, and to implicate all men in this bloodshed, each representative class of society has been allotted one or more of the victims, to torture and kill as it sees fit. Thereby the subjects of His Majesty may prove their love and loyalty to their sovereign! No sooner had I heard this news in the palace than I saw the princes hacking the unfortunate Sayyid Hasan to death.

Qurratu'l-'Ain

Sayyid Hasan!

Husain

Rushing away, and passing by the royal stables, I saw the victim who had been handed over to the Master of the Horse. He and his grooms had nailed heavy horse shoes to the soles of his feet and were chasing him around with clubs and spikes! Crazed with horror, I dashed out into the street, but on my way I heard a muffled detonation; soon some rejoicing artillery-men passed me by, calling out that they had plucked out the eyes of the Babi assigned them, and then blown him from the mouth of a gun!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Oh, dreadful ! dreadful !

HUSAIN

But I had yet to see the worst, for as I crossed the place nearing our house, I met a mob of jeering and hooting men, hurling dust and stones at two Babis walking in their midst. Allah! Shall I ever forget the sight! They were wounded in many parts of their bodies, and in these wounds lighted candles were inserted. Still they walked on heroically and in the midst of these excruciating tortures, one sang and recited poetry. A bystander addressed him derisively, saying: "since you find dying so agreeable, why do you not dance for joy ?" The martyr answered with flashing eyes and smiling lips as he began to dance.

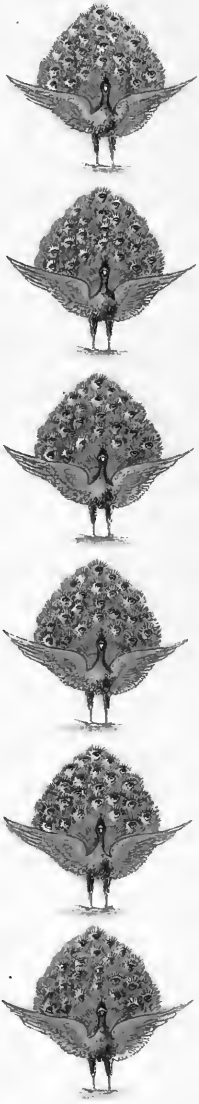
"Grasping in one hand the wine cup, clinging to
my Loved One's hair,
Gaily dancing thus would I confront the scaffold
in the square."

QURRATU'L-'AIN

How horrible ! but, how wonderful ! How wonderful !

HUSAIN

Now have I hastened hither, fearing that the angered Akbar will denounce my father for harbouring a powerful Babi. He will surely surrender you to these slaughterers. You must depart from Tihran immediately.



QURRATU'L-'AIN

But . . .

HUSAIN

I go to prepare for your flight, I shall escort you simply as a devoted servant; and, if you desire it, I will leave when you have reached a place of safety.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

I cannot.

HUSAIN

You must escape for the sake of the Cause you serve. Your life is needed.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

I cannot flee.

HUSAIN

You did so once—now you must again.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Then my flight was useful; there was work to be done in freedom, by living; but now there is work to be done in captivity, by dying.

HUSAIN

Nay, against your will, I will save you! I shall return at once to take you to some remote village.

(*Exit* HUSAIN.)

## Scene V

Qurratu'l-'Ain, *her Hand-maiden. Later* Second Wife. *Servants and* Husain.

Qurratu'l-'Ain

(*half to herself. Hand-maiden has entered in time to overhear the latter part of her conversation with* Husain.)

The hour of my death is approaching. Like a leaf in the tempest I am swept forward by the will of the Almighty. But I am at peace, for I feel that Baha'u'llah shall live on, through the protection of God, to establish the universal religion and brotherhood among all men.

Second Wife

(*entering*)

The Amir's wife sends the message that she is desirous of seeing you; it is most urgent, and she begs that you will come at once, with the escort which is waiting.

Qurratu'l-'Ain

What a useless subterfuge! (*Sends hand-maiden for her chadar.*)

Second Wife

Too bad that you must leave us before the feast is completed.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

I thank you for your warm hospitality. Your kindness has touched me sweetly. *(To hand-maiden who puts her chadar around her weeping.)* Do not grieve. Share my new-gained joy! *(Advances towards door.)* Allah be praised that I am going to meet some trial that will prove my love! I only wish that my life's work had been more complete.

(*Exit* QURRATU'L-'AIN. *Maidens enter and place bright coloured lamps around the fountain.* HUSAIN *dashes in followed by servant.*)

HUSAIN

Where is Tahira?

SECOND WIFE

She left a few moments ago.

HUSAIN

What! Where has she gone and with whom?

SECOND WIFE

To the Amir's wife with an escort sent to fetch her.

HUSAIN

No Amir's wife is seeking her company at such a critical hour. She is being taken to her death. *(Pushing servant in front of him.)* Laggard, my horse! Ah, that I may find the place in time. My horse, my swiftest horse!

(*Maidens return and continue lighting the hall of festivities.*)

CURTAIN.

# ACT V

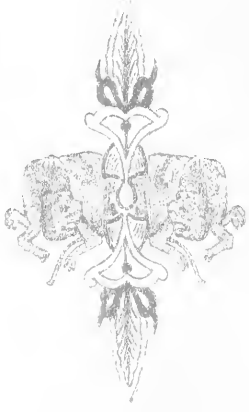
## TIHRAN

## DESOLATE PARK AND RUINED PAVILION

## A STONE WELL

## SUNSET

THE AZAN CALLS THE FAITHFUL TO PRAYER



## ACT V

SCENE—*A desolate park; ruined pavilion on one side, and stone well nearby. Sunset. Guards and* NASIR *arrive; soon after* AKBAR, AHMAD, *and other Mullas.*

### SCENE I

AKBAR
(*entering*)

Greetings to you all on this, the eventful close, of this eventful day.

AHMAD

What is the number of Babis slain since noon ?

AKBAR

To my knowledge, over twenty-five are killed by now, and Allah be praised! the most pernicious of them all, tonight, dies here.

AHMAD

I am amazed that Tahira is condemned; I was in His Majesty's presence when she was brought before him from Nur, when you and many others implored him to execute her, offering him most convicting evidences of her guilt; then, His Majesty would neither glance at your papers, nor listen to your words, but dismissed the whole matter saying: "I like her appearance, leave her and molest her not."

AKBAR

His Majesty now feels differently. Now we win his favour by ridding the world of these conspiring heretics.

AHMAD

But it has been difficult to find a willing executioner, for the fame of her charm and intelligence have spread abroad. So, finally, we have had to offer Nasir freedom from prison on condition that he shall do this deed.

AKBAR

*(turning in the direction where* NASIR *is crouched with bowed head and sullen face)*

Look up, Nasir! By this act you will be uplifted into the esteem of men.

AHMAD

Do you believe that such violent persecution will quell this uprising? Since we slew the leader, his cause has grown a thousandfold, and bloodshed only increases the mad enthusiasm of his followers. Seeds of faith watered with the blood of martyrdom have brought forth a mighty harvest.

AKBAR

It is our duty to slay all the enemies of Allah and of the Prophet. We priests, are the guardians of truth, and through us only, must the people know God. We, for the sake of our flocks, must end this impending danger.

AHMAD

I hear that this despised sect has no priesthood; that every man individually must seek for knowledge and salvation, and take the duties of life upon himself like religious vows.

AKBAR

You have rightly heard. They would overthrow the established priesthood, and have us priests become like other men. Bah! They are spiritual socialists. But the hour is growing late. I wonder what delays the escort. Think you she divines . . . and has refused to come?

AHMAD

I have heard that she is fearless.

AKBAR

In words, more than in deeds; like most fair creatures!

AHMAD

Her eloquence is renowned, and it is claimed that her arguments from the Sacred Books are unequalled.

AKBAR

She has the honeyed tongue of Satan. (*The sound of rapidly approaching hoofs is heard.*) Soldiers, take Nasir away to the end of the garden. His resolution may fail at sight of her.

## SCENE II

*The same.* QURRATU'L-'AIN *and Guards. Later* HUSAIN.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

In what name shall I salute you, seeing the atrocities you have countenanced and performed today? The road is strewn with martyrs, and yonder fierce uproar is the exultant cry of the assassins. Forsake these habits of wild beasts, and become worthy of the name of Man! Why use brute force against spirit? If our belief is erroneous, dispel the error

by reasoning with us amicably; if it is true, can any material power suppress it? Ah! realize—realize your folly! Escape from this hell of ignorance and of vice! (*The guards appear moved.*) It is not my life that I ask of you: I ask you not to become hardened into butchers of men. You are the officials of our country: serve it then to uplift it. Persia will not again be arrayed in the glory of the past, until justice and liberty reign over the whole land. For the good of our country, forget petty strife and selfish ambition, and rest not until the hour of emancipation has come. Do you think it brave or useful, to be here to entrap one weak woman? Shame on your false manhood! (*turning to Mullas.*) And you, the elect—the chosen guides! I call upon your conscience; I appeal to your heart, to weigh well what I am saying. Can an expression of truth be final, when all other things are growing and changing? Can God, the Infinite Power of life, be limited to one person or one dogma? Men look to you for teaching and guidance; turn your eyes to the re-dawning Sun, and become illumined by its splendour! Great can be your work if you will put aside your pride and serve mankind by expounding this new religion —the fulfillment of the ancient faiths! Be true shepherds of your flocks, lead them to fresh verdant pastures. You will find joy in this noble act, and eternal renown, far beyond the transitory applause of men. Reflect, humanity is one great family: do you think that you can serve the divine principle of fatherhood, by destroying the bodies of the children?

AHMAD
(*to* AKBAR.)

It is a shame that one so eloquent should die. Perhaps she will yet return to our sacred faith.

AKBAR

You waste your time, and the hour advances.

AHMAD

You are noble but misguided, Tahira. Let me save you from your error. Retract your declaration of faith, and do not openly desert the religion of your forefathers, thereby placing yourself under the law of death.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Your intention is kindly, therefore am I touched; but I cannot deny what I know to be true. I cannot be false to sincerity and to conviction. I cannot shrink back. I cannot put aside the knowledge of my immortal soul to save my body of dust. Is it better to live a few more years by relinquishing inward joy and understanding, or to die prematurely, retaining all things worth possessing? Share with me, I beseech you, my endless wealth, my subtle happiness. Do not remain in poverty and sorrow. Your state is like unto death, though you are alive. My state is eternal life, though I am on the threshold of death!

AHMAD

She does not falter:—is this woman divine?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

I follow my master, and Quddus, and my comrades, over the river of blood, into the Kingdom of peace!

AHMAD

Shameful that this woman must die!

QURRATU'L-'AIN

(*Follows guards to the pavilion; she mounts the stairs slowly, and turning, addresses her accusers.*)

Remember: the Divine Essence is one and infinite, and its attributes are manifest in all. Remember: body is the shadow, spirit is the reality; and good deeds are the voice of the soul!

My soul prays for you. When my body is no more, my spirit will yet have power to help you onward: my thoughts will surround you with loving influence. Gradually your hearts will soften and your eyes receive sight. You will see what I see. Nay, your hearts will feel what I feel, and your lips will proclaim the Truth that I proclaim.

(QURRATU'L-'AIN *enters the pavilion.* NASIR *is brought back.*)

AKBAR

Take this scarf, strangle her with it. Recall that you were turned out from home because of this woman. Do your deed quickly and thoroughly. Do not let her speak. Do not look at her face. Finish your task before the Azan rises on the still air.

(NASIR *disappears. The sound of galloping horses is heard; it stops suddenly and* HUSAIN *rushes in with his escort.*)

HUSAIN

Why are you here assembled with such grim and guilty faces? Speak!

AKBAR

Youth has lost respect for years, and commands, instead of using humble entreaty.

HUSAIN

You would gain time by hollow words and deceitful manner, but I know that Tahira is near, and that you are here to murder her.

AKBAR

Do you consider it innocent to break vows and to attack the established religion?

HUSAIN

(*to his escort*)

Search the park. (*To* AKBAR.) Your conduct makes me think that the truth and love of God are with her, and the error and hate of Satan with you. Where is your victim? Speak!

(*Receiving no answer*, HUSAIN *looks around, sees the pavilion and rushes towards it. Guards cross swords with him. Just then the Azan breaks upon the air.* HUSAIN *continues to force his way up the stairs. Suddenly,* NASIR *appears on the threshold of the pavilion with* QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *lifeless body in his arms. The green scarf hangs round her slender throat.*)

HUSAIN

Dead!

(*Taking* QURRATU'L-'AIN *he lays her on the ground and weeps over her. During the rest of the scene the Azan continues to sound and the Mullas perform their prayer in the gathering gloom.*)

Tahira, Tahira! Loveliest of women, the truest of disciples! Your death opens my eyes to the meaning of your life, and I will fervently follow your example and cherish the Cause that has made a noble woman a divine martyr. Ah! Tahira, Tahira! I feel your radiant spirit in the darkness of my sorrow. I will become more worthy to love you. (*Stands and addresses those present.*) Your prayers are empty, for your hearts do not know charity. Real prayer is the spirit of Tahira ascending to the Kingdom of freedom and love! Do not grovel on the earth, but arise through repentance to better lives.

(NASIR *seems terrified by* QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *lifeless body; he seems to dread that she is not really dead; that she will awaken to admonish him. During the latter part of this speech, unseen by* HUSAIN *he snatches up her body, drops it into the well, and begins piling stones upon it. At this moment* HUSAIN *turns toward him.*)

HUSAIN

Cease your profanation! . . . weak of purpose! Do you think that you can bury her there? She will reappear, and be ever before you all! You have rendered her immortal in the minds of men, and her spirit of love will be transmitted to millions of living hearts. You have undone your work and have established her fame. Forever after Tahira will inspire courage and sincerity and truth!

(*The Azan continues to call the Faithful to prayer.*)

CURTAIN

## HISTORICAL PERSONAGES IN THE PLAY

SAYYID 'ALI MUHAMMAD.....*The* BAB.

BAHA'U'LLAH.....*The* BAB'S *spiritual successor.*

JANABI QUDDUS.....*The* BAB'S *chief disciple.*

QURRATU'L-'AIN.....*Afterward named* TAHIRA.

HAJI MULLA MUH. SALIH...QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *father. Neither for nor against the* BAB.

HAJI MULLA 'ALI.....QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *Uncle. A follower of the* BAB.

HAJI MULLA MUH. TAQI.....QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *father-in-law and uncle. Great enemy of the* BAB.

MULLA 'ABDU'L-WAHAB.....QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *brother. Enemy of the* BAB.

MULLA MUHAMMAD.....QURRATU'L-'AIN'S *cousin and husband. Enemy of the* BAB.

QURRATU'L-'AIN'S SISTER...*Became a follower of the* BAB.

QURRATU'L-'AIN'S TWO CHILDREN.

MIRZA SALIH SHIRAZI.....*The murderer of* HAJI MULLA MUHAMMAD TAQI.

AGHA HADI.....*A Babi who helped* QURRATU'L-'AIN *to escape to Tihran.*

# HISTORICAL EVENTS ON WHICH THE PLAY IS BASED.

In 1848 Qurratu'l-'Ain was about twenty-eight years of age. She was renowned for her beauty, eloquence, learning and poetry. In Karbala she became a follower of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab. When she returned to Qaswin, her native town, she was divorced by her husband on account of her belief. She was detained in her father's house, and later was accused of instigating her uncle's murder, for two reasons: her known association with the Babis, and her saying, in speaking of her uncle, Haji Mulla Muh. Taqi, when he denounced the Bab: "I see his mouth fill with blood." [1] Three Babis were arrested for this murder. Then Mirza Salih Shirazi, a new follower of the Bab, who, still under the influence of former customs, had killed Haji Mulla Muh. Taqi, surrendered himself, saying that he alone was responsible for the crime. Nevertheless, all four were condemned. [2] Qurratu'l-'Ain, now under great suspicion, remained a prisoner in her father's home until Baha'u'llah ordered her to escape to Tihran with Agha Hadi. She stayed in Baha'u'llah's house a few days before starting out for the Mazandaran. There, a great council of Babis was held at Badasht, at which were discussed ways of

spreading the Cause, whether they should attempt to release the Bab from prison, et cetera.

In this early stage of the Babi religion, many of its followers did not understand its real mission. Baha'u'llah, who was present at Badasht, announced that the Cause should be fully disclosed at that place; there Qurratu'l-'Ain, on her own initiative, one day, her face unveiled, entered an assembly of men, and proclaimed that it was the Day of Resurrection. From her act and words great consternation ensued, in the midst of which Baha'u'llah gave the order to read aloud the sura of the Quran describing the Day of Resurrection. Many turned away from the Cause; one man even killed himself.

Janabi Quddus, the greatly gifted disciple of the Bab, and sympathetic fellow-helper of Qurratu'l-'Ain, was killed as described, at the fall of Shaykh Tabarsi. To defend Qurratu'l-'Ain against slander and abuse, the Bab named her Tahira, which means "The Pure." After leaving Badasht she stayed in Nur, and from there—when Shaykh Tabarsi had capitulated—she was brought prisoner to Tihran and led before the Shah, who dismissed her with the words quoted in the fifth Act; nevertheless, she was confined in the Kalantar's house for about two years. In 1850, Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab, and a disciple were martyred, as related in the play. In 1852 a deranged Babi made an attempt on the Shah's life;

many members of the community were hunted down and killed; several of these deaths are depicted by Husain in Act IV. On that same fateful day Qurratu'l-'Ain was brought from the Kalantar's house to a desolate garden, and there a negro was commanded to strangle her. She died with great fortitude; her body was thrown into a dry well which stood in the garden.

Babism increased and spread throughout Persia, and developed, through the influence of Baha'u'llah, into Bahaism, called by his name—the Universal Religion, which is now influencing men of all races and beliefs, throughout the world.

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(1) Haji Mulla Muh. Taqi was in reality killed at dawn after the morning prayer, but, for the sake of the dramatic development, his death has been placed an hour or two later.

(2) When Mirza Salih Shirazi saw that his self-accusation had not saved his comrades he managed to escape from prison and was one of the Babis killed at the siege of Shaykh Tabarsi.

N. B.—The verses quoted in Act IV are translations from the original Persian by the erudite Orientalist, Professor Edward G. Browne.

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